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December 15, 1994

Debrief on discussion with Mike Neufeld, Tom Crouch and Steve Sator(? assistant to Harwit), December 15, 1994, 3-5:15PM (AFTER morning group conference with Harwit and staff, and our EG working group (Musil, Volk, Dear, Matlock, Coney....))

--MN: There's no chance of any major changes; nothing but a few word changes, to correct the misstatements I pointed out [i.e., I presume, to make them un-false, without making them other than misleading. I.e., to change them from false to misleading.]

--I did leave him with the chapters copied from Strauss (none of them knew of his role with Forrestal, or his position), Grew, Stimson memoir (especially passage on offer of Emperor, and conclusion in effect renouncing Just War restrictions. It is, indeed, plausible that since, as Stimson says, "the face of war is the face of death" that in the age of long-range bombers (or missiles) the distinction between Just Means and Unjust means is bound to be eroded, just as the distinction between "precision bombing" and terror bombing will erode. Maybe the concept of restraint in war is outmoded, after all--for all my clinging to it--see Rwanda and Bosnia and Panama (and Nicaragua, and El Salvador, etc; terror on the ground, and no one tried for it, even excluded from the CFR).

--So, these may have some effect on him. (He has read Sigal and Bird: latter, he thinks, takes McCloy's memoir (? diary?) too seriously; he says BB thinks Bird isn't cautious enough about memoirs. (But I think BB is selectively skeptical of such evidence, as in dismissing Ike's memory--when it doesn't serve Bernstein's theses).

--But there is little chance they will put in the evidence that would support my emphasis on the assurance option, because the Air Force Assoc. and Legion especially targetted that point. They insist, "It's outrageous to question the rightness or necessity for UCS." I ask: Do they still oppose retaining the Emperor? "No."

"Well, that was the issue." Anyway, virtually everyone except Byrnes--and Truman, after (not before) discussion with Byrnes--did recommend "modifying" or "clarifying" the surrender terms. When I mentioned the Stimson memoir concluding that this approach might have shortened the war, Crouch came back with "hindsight." But it was what Stimson thought at the time, along with Grew, Forrestal, McCloy, Bard, Leahy and the JCS (who seemed to compromise on this at Potsdam) and the Combined Chiefs of Staff and Churchill (and Stalin? Crouch thought the Australians may have objected to keeping the Emperor).

They thought none of the Legion or Air Force officials knew anything of the history I described--of the assurance proposals. But their focussing on any mention of the possible modification of

UCS seems suspiciously well-aimed. Since the controversy arose, MN said, some of them have been reading up.

Every time I said that the current text essentially followed the Stimson article, they came back that the Air Force doesn't agree--it doesn't go far enough for them, they want more changes (and every piece of body language and tone suggested that they expected to get them, correctly). On the one hand, MN told me that it had gotten too late for much change, for technical reasons: walls were going up, panels had to be made. Yet there were a lot of hints that there would still be some changes, in the wrong direction. E.g. the Air Force doesn't really like anything on Japanese victims: they had proposed that the whole Hiroshima room be eliminated.

I asked if there was some line they wouldn't cross, something that would be too much. Steve said quickly, "yes." "What?" "Overt propaganda."

I said (having come to a confidential and blunt tone in the discussion, which was very frank): Look in the mirror. You've crossed that line a couple of scripts ago. That's where you are.

"From the appearance in this 5th script of so many outright falsehoods--which I take for granted you wouldn't have allowed, if you'd realized--I suspect you are kidding yourselves, you haven't really faced just how far you've come, or where you are.

This is a justification for a slaughter of civilians, an act of terrorism on a genocidal scale. It's like a Ronald Reagan Library version of the Vietnam War, or Nixon's on the bombing of Hanoi, or LBJ on My Lai. Or a German memorial to the bombing of Rotterdam: "The deaths were exaggerated, there were only 900 killed." Or the Japanese minister's deprecation of the Rape of Nanjing.

It's not just a justification of strategic bombing, it's a justification of terror bombing, area bombing of the kind the US Air Force condemned when the British did it in 1943 or the Nazis and Japanese earlier.

Steve points out that the exhibit does show the scale of damage to the Japanese (after my lecture on the total omission of any indication of real alternatives). "But that can make it even worse. As long as no alternative is shown, as long as the whole thrust of the presentation is that this attack was necessary, therefore legitimate, acceptable, then when you show the actual damage, the worse you show, what you're conveying is, 'this is what was acceptable and necessary, even this; this is what can be justified, under the right circumstances."

[It's a defense brief in a war crimes trial. Everything that can serve to justify, that suggests there was no alternative, is presented, as by Stimson; nothing that would weaken the case for a "necessity defense, a choice of evils defense" is included.

[Why it matters; American conviction that even this was justified and necessary; what isn't? Who else can be denied the same benefits? First use. Testing, etc.

How

[Hyp: interpret much of official "explanation" and even memoir-writing as if it were the construction of a necessity defense brief.]

civilians as the targets, victims (casualties) [can civilians, illegally targetted, be described as "casualties"--as if they were military?]

Tell story of Grew effort, and Potsdam consensus (speaking of consensu--not of historians, or officials with hindsight. True, none of these officials said, "under no conditions should you use this bomb"--i.e., a strict Just War application. (That seems to have been Leahy's feeling, but no evidence that he expressed it: as he did about gas and BW, which he saw as just the same. MN questioned whether any of the officials who proposed the Ultimatum-and-assurance really felt strongly against the bomb. I proposed McCloy (ask Bird); obviously, Bard. Apparently Strauss. (Forrestal?) They did not pose the offer as an alternative to the bomb, nor recommend it on the basis that it would make the bomb unnecessary (did they? McCloy on June 18?) --as they did, about precluding a Soviet entry, or making invasion unnecessary. (To do so would seem to have been to criticize the firebombing?) But see Ike. (BB discounts the testimony of Ike, Leahy and McCloy about their contemporaneous feelings and expression of them--in absence of documents. But then, it wouldn't show up for Szilard either i documents, except for petition. See Vietnam.

[Why did Stimson feel so strongly about firebombing--though he did nothing effective to stop it (could he have, practically speaking?)--and less, it would seem, against using the bomb?